

Folklore Student Interviews on Lynchings, 1970-1973 from the Polly Stewart papers (2006.244)

From 1970 to 1973, students in Dr. Polly Stewart's folklore and folklife classes sought to capture the memory of lynchings on the Maryland's Eastern Shore. These students interviewed 28 community members, typing or handwriting their stories in a methodology similar to oral histories. Although many of the stories capture vivid descriptions of local racial terror lynchings—specifically Matthew Williams in 1931—they also exemplify the fault of memory 40 years later. In fact, most of the interviewees confuse dates and events with other local lynchings—or were retelling stories they had heard from older generations.

However, the students did not collect release forms from interviewees—most of whom are now deceased—which would provide the students, and subsequently the Nabb Center, permission to publish the information. In order to protect the privacy of both the students and interviewees, names and addresses have been redacted.

More resources related to racial terror lynchings on Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore can be found in the Nabb Center's resource guide: <https://libraryguides.salisbury.edu/lowereslynchings>

For more information about this collection or its redactions, please contact Nabb Center staff at nabbcenter@salisbury.edu

WARNING

These interviews include descriptions of graphic violence

Local History Archives, Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture,
Salisbury University

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for Delmarva History and Culture, Salisbury University, Salisbury, Maryland

Interview #1

Documentation of Individual Items of Folklore

Date Collected: June 25, 1973

3:25 p.m.

Place Collected: Springhill Road

Collector's Name: NAME REDACTED

Informant's Name: NAME REDACTED

Address: Salisbury, Md.

Address: Cambridge, Md.

Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.

Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.

Age: 27

Age: 67

Race, nationality, or ethnic background:

Race, nationality, or ethnic background:

Black-American

Black-American

Occupation: Teacher

Occupation: Coldwater Seafood

Historical Legend

The office was on Lake Street where old man Freeay's store was. I was in the office to get a tally board. I worked there as a basket filler. I saw this boy walking down Lake Street. He looked kind of strange after I saw him. I didn't go near the office anymore. After I found that he was dead, I didn't go back in the office anymore. Some people said James did it but I know he didn't do it. I never said nothing about it. They wanted to lynch me, figgered I knew something about it. I seen James run out the back and jump on him.

James shot the boy, they took him to the hospital. The gang went and got him and took him to the courthouse and hanged him. While he was hanging there they cut parts off of him. They cut his private off and his toes.

They said something about having "nigger Toes" for ornaments. Then after they hung him they poured oil over him and burned him up.

Interview #2

Date Collected- Aug 31, 1972

Collector's Name- NAME REDACTED

Address- Salisbury

Birthplace- Ridgely

Age- 21

Race- White

Occupation- Student

Place Collected- Salisbury

Informant's Name- NAME REDACTED

Address- Salisbury

Birthplace- Salisbury

Age- 77

Race- White

Occupation- Security Guard

NAME REDACTED told me about the Negro uprisings in Salisbury. He told me of one incident where a Negro who was fired by a white man returned to the white man's office and demanded his back pay. When the white man refused him, the Negro pulled a gun on him then. Here the white man tried to wrestle the gun from him and in doing so, the gun went off...shooting the white man in the gut. Realizing what he had done, the Negro ran from the office but the white man had gained the gun and shot the Negro so he couldn't run. Then the White man died. The Negro was arrested and put in the security ward at the hospital on the third floor. That evening a mob formed and, disguised, went up to the Negro's room and threw him out the window. They then proceeded to drag him down light street so as to set examples for the others. Then they set him on fire in front of the courthouse, tarred and feathered him then took him to the Western Union office and hung him on the telegraph pole for all the others to see.

Interview #3

Date Collected: August 8, 1971

Collector: NAME REDACTED

Address: Quantico, Md.

Birthplace: Washington, D.C.

Age: 22

Race: White

Occupation: Student

Collector's Mother-in-law

Place Collected: Fruitland, Md.

Informant's Name: NAME REDACTED

Address: Fruitland, Md.

Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.

Age: 59

Race: White

Occupation: Secretary

Hanging: 1933

"Well, I know it was in the winter - in December because Christmas was coming. It was either 1932 or 1933 - yes 1933 because it was during the depression and Willard and I had moved in that fall with my parents. We had just gotten on our feet- Willard had bought a truck and he had some colored men helping him cut timber for Mr. D. J. Elliott. Anyway it was on a Friday and Willard had a load of timber he wanted to deliver to Mr. Elliott before Mr. Elliott left the office so he got there around 3 pm and Mr. Elliott asked him if he wanted to be paid that day or the next morning he could come pick up his check. Well, Willard said he'd wait til Saturday morning first he'd get another load in and if in time he'd pick his check up that night as he had the men to pay.

"Well, by 4 or 4:30 that day everyone in town knew Mr. Elliott had been shot and I was so upset and knew Willard would be too because Mr. Elliott always called him son and had given him work when he laid off all his other lumbermen. I drove out toward where Willard was working and met him on the way into town and told him what happened. It seemed that a colored man had shot him and Mr. Elliott's son had shot the colored man and had only wounded him. The police had come and he was taken to Peninsula General Hospital. You know at that time the hospital wasn't like it is now- it had only the middle part and the colored man was in a ward on the first floor on the right. Anyway, Willard got in the car and he drove us over to the hospital as he was really upset and wanted to know what was going on. The traffic was terrible but we pulled up to the front gate of the hospital. This was around six p.m. The people had

begun to form a big party and there was talk about "gettin' him!" Willard got out of the car and walked in the front door (the mob was outside the ward windows) then the mob moved inside the hospital and threw him out the windows of the ward in just his hospital gown and bandages. The mob drug him from the hospital to the courthouse yard. By this time the mob and the traffic was so terrific Willard was forced to go with the mob and I with the traffic. There were hundreds of people there. As the traffic edged toward downtown all I could see was that little white hospital gown fluttering in the breeze. It was terrible."

"After he was dead- he was probably unconscious before they hung him- Willard said they were beating him and torturing him all the way up there and with him wounded - I'm surprised he wasn't dead before they made it up there. Anyway after he was dead they cut his body down and dragged it to colored town across West Main Street bridge - behind a car! It was awful and I couldn't get away and now and again I could see Willards head above the others. Well when they got to that bridge there was a colored man sittin on and honey, when they saw them coming he dove off that bridge after someone called "There's one - get him!" and nobody ever did find him!"

"They took the body and hung it over a guy wire at the corner of Lake Street. Then after a while they drug it back down Main Street to Poplar Hill Avenue across from where manhattan used to be and there was a filling station across the street where they took the body poured gas on it and burned it!"

"By this time Willard had gotten to the car and we had started to move towards home which was on South Division Street."

"I still won't buy a Baltimore Sun. They were terrible about it - they called us everything in the book - said we were beating everyone with hoses, rakes, shovels - and if they hadn't exaggerated everything that happened it would have died down a lot quicker."

"The Baltimore papers sent reporters, and the militia was sent in to quiet us down. But the Eastern Shore people would have none of other people telling them what they should and should not do. They pushed one reporter's car in the Wicomico River and the fire company, which at that time was across the street from the armory, squirted the militia with their fire hoses and told them in no uncertain terms to get out of town."

“They did leave town, but to this day there are hot heads in this town that would take the law into their own hands again!”

This story is as true an account as an eyewitness can make. My mother-in-law had told it to me before but not in such detail. When I asked her to tell it to me again she added the remark that her husband did not get paid for that timber until March and the men he had working for him were not paid for two weeks after it happened.

Interview #4

Collected: November 23, 1970

Salisbury, Maryland

Date Collected: 6/15/73

Collector: NAME REDACTED

Address: REDACTED

Birthplace: Baltimore, Md.

Race; Nationality: White; German

Occupation: Student

Place Collected: Salisbury

Informant: NAME REDACTED

Address: REDACTED

Birthplace: Salisbury

Age: 62

Race; Nationality: White; Irish

Occupation: Retired

The last lynching in Salisbury was back in the early 30's. I guess it must have been oh, 1932-33. Anyway my sister Frances and I had gone to the old Arcade Theatre which used to be next to the old Montgomery Ward building downtown, and we were headed for her house. We heard the noise of the crowd and we didn't know what was going on. Frances lived out to Lake St then and that was when that section was all white. There weren't many negros. Any how when we got to the 10¢ store on West Main and Lake Street we walked right into it all. It was awful, they had taken that man and had his burnt body up on the street lamp. It was just awful. Frances and I hurried on home and got into the house. And all night long we could hear them going up and down the street shooting at the negros. They were scared right out of their skins. Frances let some of them come up on her porch and some went under the house they were so scared.

Everybody claimed the colored man had killed Dan Elliott at the lumber mill on Lake St. and had robbed him. But it ain't so because an old colored lady we had known for years told us what happened. She said that the colored man had saved money from working at the mill and had asked Dan Elliott to keep it for him. So on that day the colored man went to get his money, but it was gone. It seems that Dan Elliott's son had stolen the money and when he was confronted by his father, he shot the father and then shot the colored man. But the colored man got away. Anyhow, after everything was over and done with the son's wife left him and he went crazy and had to be put away. That's the reason why I believe the colored lady's story more than any others. She was as

honest as the day is long and I don't see any reason why she would lie because she was a good woman.

It was a time though and quite a fuss was made over it. It seems they took that man right out of Peninsula General. Threw him out the second story window and marched him downtown to the courthouse and hung him in a tree there. The tree was cut down soon after. I don't know why, I guess because of what happened and all. Anyhow after they hung that man they dragged him behind a car and then set fire to him and hung him on that street lamp. And that's when Frances and I came upon it all. It got worse and worse. So bad that they sent the old 5th Regiment from Baltimore and they stayed in the old Armory which was where the library is now. And the people got so upset that they sent outsiders in that the men surrounded the Armory and flushed them out. When they came out of the Armory the firemen turned their hoses on them. It was a mess. I never had seen anything like it.

Interview #5

Date Collected: 1970 & 1973
Place Collected: Salisbury Maryland
Informants Name: NAME REDACTED
Address: Salisbury, Maryland
Age: 45

Race: White Caucasian
Occupation: Secretary at Prince Street
Elementary School
Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.

When I was a little girl there was a colored man in Salisbury who was supposed to have murdered someone in the Silk Mill on Mill Street. The people of the town drug him through the streets of Salisbury and doused him in kerosene. He was then burned and hung up on a tree in the courtyard.

The militia came down in armored trucks. Because of the militia coming down all of the schools near the armory were closed so that they could be used to store guns and house soldiers. Many riots broke out at this time.

Collector: NAME REDACTED

Interview #6

Date Collected: June 18, 1973

Collector's Name: NAME REDACTED

Address: REDACTED Avenue

Birthplace: Cambridge, Md.

Age: 41 years

Race, nationality, or ethnic background:

Caucasian

Occupation: Physical Therapy Assistant

Place Collected: REDACTED

Informant's Name: My informant asked me please not to use her name.

Address:

Birthplace:

Age: 70 years

Race, nationality, or ethnic background:

Caucasian

Occupation:

Item: (exact transcription- use additional sheet of paper if necessary).

It was in the winter of 1933 that the lynching took place in downtown Salisbury. I had only been home from work for a short while and my father came in and told me what was going on between downtown and the hospital. I was always full of curiosity and I turned my supper off, it was cooking, and headed for town as fast as I could go. It was dark but my legs were really moving. When I got as far as Peninsula General Hospital there was a mob there, so I stopped there first. The lynching mob went into the hospital and got this colored man and threw him out the window in his gown tail. He had a bandage on his leg also. Then they tied him with a rope and dragged him to the courthouse lawn. His buttocks did not have a God's bit of skin left on them. They were raw from being dragged down South Division Street. When they got to the courthouse lawn they threw up a rope on the highest limb. Then they hoisted him up and let him drop to the ground, hard as they could. They did this at least three times. I think this is really what killed him. Then they dragged him to the filling station on East Main and Market Street. There they carried bucket after bucket of gasoline and poured on him then set him afire. He was burned to a crisp charcoal. Then they dragged his burned body back up to Pat Doody's Wholesale Grocery Store and hung him up a post in front of this store. They let him stay hanging there.

There was not a colored person to be seen on the street in this town. They were jumping overboard and swimming across the Wicomico River, as cold as it was, in order to get

home. They turned cars over and threw somebody's car overboard. The State Militia was called in from Baltimore. The firemen turned the fire hose on them.

At the time of the lynching it was believe that this colored man had shot Dan Elliott. But many people say it was really Dan Elliott's son who shot him. This colored man was on the premises and heard the shot and ran. When he ran the son shot him and hit him in the leg. This was why he was in P.G.H. I believe this is the story the colored man gave when he was admitted to the hospital.

Dan Elliott's son lost his mind after this and had to be institutionalized in the Eastern Shore State Hospital after this. They say he never was right mentally after that night.

Description of circumstance under which the item was collected: time of day, persons present, locale, etc. Also state relationship between collector and informant; manner in which item was elicited; whether the informant had been heard to use the item before; if so; in what form and under what circumstances.

Time of day. About 7:00P.M.

Relationship. None

Persons present. Two of her daughters

After I had asked about thirty people in this area I finally found one person who would tell me this story if I would not use their name. It must have been so horrible every one just tries to erase it from their minds.

Informant's description of circumstances under which he first heard the item (when, where, from whom, etc.)

My informant was there at this event.

Informant's explanation of the item if the meaning is obscure, and his appraisal of its function:

Collector's appraisal of informants personality; informant's general use of the kind of folklore collected here; description of other genres of folklore known by informant:

She is a reliable, honest person.

Other pertinent information about the item collected not given above:

Interview #7

Birthplace: Indian Town

Age: 51

Race: Caucasian Methodist

Occupation glazer at Charlie Brown
Glass Co.

Informant: NAME REDACTED

Place: Salisbury Maryland, 21801

Lynching

"There was a lynchin' some years ago in Salisbury. The man that was ahead of it was from Cambridge. What happened was, this man by the name of Dan Elliot had been murdered in his office at work. His son, James, found him slumped over his desk. He right away accused a colored man who worked for him of the murder. James got a gun and shot for his head, but he only singed him. When James found out he wasn't dead and that he was in the hospital, he got a gang together and they went to get him. He went right up to his room on the second floor and threw him out the window. The gang on the street then drug him for about a mile. Next, they took him to the courthouse and him. Then, from what I understand, everybody took turns shootin' at him and goin' up to him and cuttin' pieces out of him. My father told me the story, and he always believed that the guy was innocent. But, as my father said there were a lot of prejudices back then. I've heard alot of people say he was innocent and a lot say that he wasn't. I really don't know myself."

Occupation: Student

Age: 21 Race: Caucasian Methodist

Birthplace: Salisbury

Collector: NAME REDACTED

Interview #8

Place Collected: Salisbury, Md.

Informant: NAME REDACTED

Address: Mt. Hermon Rd.

Salisbury, Md.

Birthplace: Mardela Springs, Md.

Age: 78

Race: Caucasian

Salisbury Lynching

The man's name was Daniel James Elliott. He had a big lumber business an' everybody liked him. He was shot in his office of business. The colored fellow got his arm broken when someone hit him as he was trying to escape. He was carried to the hospital but they came in his room an' threw him out the window. They had a car waitin' below an' they put a chain around his neck an' tied him to the car an' pulled him through all the prominent streets of town. They then tied him to a tree in the courthouse yard. It caused a mess all over Salisbury. A car was thrown in the river. (Mrs. NAME REDACTED thought it was the governor's car. Mr. NAME REDACTED thought it was a colored family's car.)

Date Collected: August, 1971

Collector: NAME REDACTED

Address: Rolling Rd.

Salisbury, Md.

Birthplace: Norfolk, Va.

Age: 18

Race: Caucasian

Occupation: Student

Interview #9

Date Collected: Nov 1, 1971

Collector's Name: NAME REDACTED

Informant: Refused

Age: Refused

Address: Salisbury, Md.

Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.

Race: White

Occupation: Refused

Collector: REDACTED

Address: Salisbury, Md.

Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.

Age: 19

Race: White

Occupation: Student

First Hand account on the hanging that took place in 1930's.

The informant was about 16 yrs old when the trouble started. Now that he looks back it seems that the animosity was built up in the townspeople before it, the hanging, occurred. At that time the racial problem was much different in the respect that the Blacks were treated as dirt or a second class of people so to speak. Some may disagree with that definition as applying to now so I'll try to also put it another way. The white's as a community or group as a whole felt little or nothing for the Blacks. Now there is a closer understanding and now if you look down upon the Blacks you are in the minority.

It was about 1929 when the town's people heard the news around harvest time, whenever that is. They had heard a nigger was in jail for killing four whites no one seemed to know anything more, stories spread. The informant lived at this time in Snow Hill he told me what actually happened; there was this family whom lived just outside of Ocean City and they, husband, wife, and 2 daughters, hired a Black man to help the family with the crops. It seems that after harvest was over the farmer told the black man he would have to go for they wouldn't need him any longer. This was supposedly to have triggered the black man to kill the father. He then tied up the mother and 2 daughters and sexually abused them one after the other. He was then caught and put in the Berlin Jail. The mobs caused the law to move the black to the Snow Hill prison, where the informant said he saw him. The trials in this area were dismissed to Baltimore and 3 yrs later he still wasn't HUNG. The feeling in the community was getting hotter.

Building up was the animosity toward the Blacks. Building up was the animosity toward the Blacks.

The scene was set...: When everyone heard that a white woman was sexually attacked by another Black, pow. The actual story the informant told me was that the black had been seeing the white woman all along and they had been having sex. This particular time the husband caught them, the woman cried rape. The husband beat the black bad enough to have to take him to the hospital. A mob told the guard at the door that if he didn't let them in he would be killed. The mob throw the Black man out of the window. The informant said he was dead when he reached the ground. The mob took the body to the courthouse hung him and then down to the Red Star Bus Stop where the informant overheard the conversation between a mobster and the owner. The owner said he was closed the mobster said, "if you don't give me the keys to the gas pumps we'll tear them down." The owner obliged. The mob tied the body on the back of a pick-up and set him afire. The informant recalls the stench smell of the burning skin. The pick up then drug the body through the streets and then hung the rest of the body at the wharf across from Hammond's market on Lake St. in Salisbury.

Interview #10

Date Collected: 8/3/71

Collector: NAME REDACTED

Address: Pocomoke City, Md.

Birthplace: Gumboro, Del.

Occupation: Teacher

Race: White

Age: 31

Place Collected: Informant's Home

Informant: NAME REDACTED

Address: Willards, Md.

Birthplace: Near Willards

Age: About 75

Race: White

Occupation: Farmer

Dan Elliot run a basket factory in Salisbury. This nigger went in and shot him. Dan's son wounded the nigger and they caught him and put him in the hospital. That night they got him out of the hospital and lynched him. They drug him over town and left him hangin' in the courtyard.

There was one time Governor Lane came to Salisbury because people were mad about a nigger killing somebody, but I think this was a different case and they put the Governor's car in the river.

Comments: Informant is my grandfather on my father's side. He worked in the timber businesses for several years with my father. Stories were collected from him to "help me do a college paper." Stories were collected at his home with my grandmother and mother present. He kept insisting that he did not believe in witches, witchcraft, and the supernatural, although he admitted he knows of some strange happenings which he can't explain.

Interview #11

June 15, 1972

Born: Ocean City, Md.

Age: 48 yrs.

White, English, Teacher

Informant: Names REDACTED

Retired, American Can Co.

Item: Salisbury Lynching

This colored fellow walked into this office. Attempted to rob the old man...killed him...shot him! His son was coming into the lumberyard and he saw the fellow coming out of the office and the son ran him down and struck him in the head with a two-by-four. That's how they caught him. It must have hurt him pretty badly; they took him to the hospital. A bunch of men went over and took him away from the hospital. I think they threw him out of a window and took him down to the courthouse and hung him to a tree. I didn't know about putting gasoline on him, but I do know the fact is I know who done that... wouldn't want to know that. A bunch of hotshot boys took the fella, after they took him down, put a rope to him and drug him all over town. A man here in town now done that.

Interview #12

Collector

Collected: June 28, 1972

Address: Cambridge, Md.

Birthplace: Cambridge

Age: 19

Race: White, American

Occupation: Student

Informant

Address: Cambridge

Birthplace: Cambridge

Age: 63

Race: White, American

Occupation: Librarian Cambridge High School

The Salisbury Lynching

I was teaching in Pocomoke High School and was going up to Salisbury by bus to be met by my brother. I was the only passenger on the bus from Pocomoke to Salisbury. On the way up the bus driver said to me, "I'm afraid we're going to have some trouble tonight. A colored man killed a white business man this afternoon."

As the bus rounded the corner from Camden Avenue onto the business center, I knew I was in trouble. The streets were packed, and an ominous silence was over the crowd. The expressions on peoples faces showed hatred.

I got off the bus at the Wicomico Hotel. As I did, a couple of teenage scouts asked if they could help me. I thanked them and said I was going inside the hotel to wait for my brother. It was a while longer before my brother came with a friend of his. He said, "What's going on in Salisbury?" I said, "Let's get in the car and get home. I am afraid there is trouble."

As we went out, we heard that the mob had gone to the hospital to get the man that had shot the business man. They were going to lynch him.

My reaction was to get out quickly. We were opposite the Court House Green, where it was to take place before midnight.

We came to Cambridge, but before midnight we heard the mob had been to the hospital, taken the man from the bed, tied him to a car, and dragged him through the streets, to the Court House Green where he was lynched.

I remember how shocked I was at the amount of women and children in the crowd that night.

Interview #13

Documentation of Individual Items of Folklore

Date Collected:	Place Collected: Hebron, Md.
Collector's Name: NAME REDACTED	Informant's Name: NAME REDACTED
Address: REDACTED	Address: REDACTED
Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.	Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.
Age: 27	Age: 31
Race, nationality or ethnic background: Black-American	Race, nationality or ethnic background: Black-American
Occupation: Teacher	Occupation: Seamstress
Item: (exact transcription- use additional sheet of paper if necessary.)	

Lynching in Salisbury

This man's son that was killed in Salisbury is in Deer Head's Hospital. He said he told the police he saw a black man running from the office on Lake Street where his father had been killed. They got this black man, they locked him up, they got him out of jail, this lynching party and hung him right on the courthouse lawn. They castrated him before they hung him. And everyone of these men who had something to do with lynching, their wives when they had a baby afterward each one had something wrong with it. Said when one child was born it was black on one side and white on the other. One child was born without a vagina; she had one hole to do everything out of it. The son who told the lie he ended up over Deer's Head. And before he died, he sit up there with sores all over his body, sores everywhere. You couldn't even tell him for sores everywhere. And all their wives left them and their children hated them. This was something like a curse. You reap what you sow.

Interview #14

Date Collected: October 25, 1972

Collector: NAME REDACTED

Address: REDACTED

Seaford, Delaware

Birthplace: Milford, Delaware

Age: 21

Occupation: Student

American

Place Collected: Salisbury, Md.

Informant: NAME REDACTED

Address: Salisbury, Md.

Birthplace: Salisbury, Maryland

Age: 23

Occupation: Student

- I. In the 1930's a colored man killed a man and his wife who were mill operators. They locked him up in the Salisbury jail and then transferred him to Peninsula Hospital. Citizens went to the hospital and made a rope with sheets and put him out the window. Citizens underneath the window got him and dragged him up and down Main Street while he was still alive. They had the state militia and people pushed several of their cars over into the river. Local firemen turned hoses on the militia. All traffic stopped on Main Street and it seemed like all the people had weapons (guns, knives). Then they put him on a telephone pole and burned him.
- II. I had asked NAME REDACTED if she knew of any legends of Salisbury and she said she would inquire.
- III. NAME REDACTED got this story from her stepfather who has lived in Salisbury all of his life.
- IV. It is not necessary to explain.
- V. Since NAME REDACTED stepfather lived in Salisbury during this incident I believe some of this story to be true.

Interview #15

Date Collected: 11/5/72

Address: REDACTED

Birthplace: Cambridge, Md.

Age: 19

Occupation: Student

Place Collected: my home

Informant's Name: NAME REDACTED

Address: same

Birthplace: East New Market, Md.

Age: 47

Occupation: housewife

ITEM:

This story was told to me by my mother who was an eye witness at the courtyard in Salisbury.

"This colored man was in the hospital. They drug him out in his hospital gown and hung him in a tree. I remember seeing a white thing hanging in a tree with a bag on its head."

She would have been 6 yrs old at the time

Interview #16

Date Collected: Sept. 23, 1972

Collector's Name: NAME REDACTED

Address: Bivalve, Md.

Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.

Age: 20

Race: White, American

Occupation: college student

Place Collected: Home of informant

Informant's Name: NAME REDACTED

Address: Address REDACTED

Salisbury, Md.

Birthplace: Bryantown, Md.

Age: 71

Race: White, American

Occupation: housewife

Item: This lynching happened in Salisbury in the 1930's. A man named Dan Elliott was killed and this colored man was blamed for the killing. The colored man worked for Mr. Elliott. Masked men went and got the man out of the hospital. The man was supposed to have robbed and killed Mr. Elliott. They had an argument over his pay. He shot him from the back. These masked men went and got the man out of the hospital and then they hung him on the courthouse lawn and put him behind a cart and drug him down the mainstreet of the town. There had been a murder before this one and the suspect got away free. This time they got the man at fault and punished him as an example to other people.

This story of the Salisbury lynching was told to me by my grandmother. She said this was what she could remember of what happened. She said some of the masked men who were involved in the lynching were still alive, but she would not tell their names.

Interview #17

Collector's name: NAME REDACTED

Address: Salisbury, Md.

Age: 25

Race: White

Occupation: high school teacher
(English)

Place collected: Salisbury, Md.

Informant's name: NAME REDACTED

Age: late 50's

Race: White

Occupation: Banker

This is how my father-in-law described the hanging which took place in Salisbury on the courthouse lawn.

A colored man went into Mr. Dan Elliott's office on Lake Street and killed him on the spot. Mr. Elliott was the manager of a lumber yard. His office was on Lake Street. He was taken to the hospital, but he died either before or shortly after arriving there. The black man also had to be taken to the hospital because he had injured himself jumping out of a window trying to escape. The people of Salisbury liked Mr. Elliott and, therefore, decided to settle the matter themselves. They went after the black man and "drug him right out of the hospital" after throwing him through the window. Then they took him to the courthouse and hanged him.

(At this point, my mother-in-law, who was listening to Richard's account, put in the comment that they "hanged him on the highest tree.") Richard saw the crowd pass his store. He followed them to the courthouse and saw the crowd pass his store. He followed them to the courthouse and witnessed the hanging. He knew many people in Salisbury, but he says, "I right now could not tell you a single person that I saw." He adds, "Amazing thing about a crowd --you don't see individuals, you just see a crowd."

Both Richard and his wife were uncertain as to what happened after the actual hanging. NAME REDACTED (my mother-in-law) thought that they "drug him behind a car around town." NAME REDACTED disagreed with this, but my mother-in-law still thought he had been put "on" a car somehow. She was rather vague. The incident happened at about 8:00pm.

My father-in-law told me this story at my request on June 11, 1972. He and my mother-in-law were in the kitchen preparing Sunday dinner, and they talked as they worked.

Interview #18

Date Collected: June 28, 1972

Collector's Name: NAME REDACTED

Address: Isabella St.

Salisbury, Md.

Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.

Age: 20

Race, nationality or ethnic background:

English-American

Occupation: Student

Place Collected: Informant's house

Informant: NAME REDACTED

Address: Isabella St.

Salisbury, Md.

Birthplace: Landonville, Md.

Age: 59

Race, nationality or ethnic background:

English & Irish Ancestors

Occupation: Sewage treatment Plant

Operator for the city

Yes, I know a little about the last lynchin' in Salisbury but not too much. My mother went an' saw that lynchin'. They hung him down on Lake Street and they hung him on the courthouse lawn. They dragged him behind a car down somewhere on Lake Street and then they strung him up again. I guess they wanted all the colored people to be sure an' see it.

He worked down here at a mill where they made baskets down on Lake Street. And he killed the boss or the owner. They beat him up pretty bad so they took him to the hospital. At the hospital they went after him and threw him right out the window out onto the lawn. Then they took him by car down to the courthouse. Then they hung him on a tree up there. Then when he was dead they dragged him down to Lake and Main and strung him up again so all the colored people could see him. And that was it.

This story was collected early one morning at about 12:30am when the informant, the collector and the informant's other daughter, granddaughter and wife were present. The informant is the collector's father. This story was gotten in a conversation about how Salisbury had changed. The collector had never heard the informant use the story before.

The informant said that he was present at the lynching with his mother and that at the time he was about seventeen years old. He said that he could remember the incident fairly clearly.

The informant rarely makes use of the kind of story which he told here unless he is in the company of old friends. Then he begins to reminisce about how things were when he was younger. The informant knew one or two stories about ghosts but that was all.

Interview #19

Collector

June 25, 1972 10:30 P.M.

NAME REDACTED

Address: Salisbury, Maryland

Birthplace: Salisbury, Maryland

Age: 24

Race: W. American

Occupation: Teacher

Place collected: Salisbury, Md.

Informant's name: Mr and Mrs. NAME

REDACTED (collector's in-laws)

Address: Salisbury, Maryland

Birthplace: Salisbury, Maryland -both

Age: 48 bth

Race: W. American

Occupation: Nurse

Manager of hardware store

This legend was told to my husband and myself as a true story. Both believed what they had told. NAME REDACTED would not say that he was there but did say that he had talked to people who were. NAME REDACTED saw the whole thing according to her story.

(Item is the legend about the lynching in Salisbury in 1930's. Both of them contributed to the tale as it was told and so I have it together as they told it but the part contributed by NAME REDACTED is underlined.)

There was a colored man who worked for Mr. James Elliott. There was ill feeling between them. One night someone came and shot Mr. Elliott shot his brains out and almost everyone thought that it was the colored man who had done it. In chasing him he was wounded and was put in the hospital with guards around him. Just before this near Whaleyville there had been a case where a colored tenant had shot his boss, the wife and two kids and had spread the brains all over the ceiling. He was taken to court and they carried it all the way to the Supreme Court as the case *Ewell vs. Lee*. The court punished him by jail but everyone was mad that he had not been put to death. So when this happened shortly after a group of farmers went to the hospital and there were so many of them that the guards bailed out of the windows and ran. They took the colored guy and cut off his toes and fingers and then they sold them for a dollar. I know because

I touched one of them not meaning to. I had gotten out in the street and was carried by the crowd down the street and could not get back. Anyway they marched him to the courthouse lawn and hanged him on the tree facing front to the right. Mr. E. R. White got up on a soapbox and tried to stop it but it did not do any good. After they had hanged him they dragged the body through the streets and through the colored section of town. So at this time Preston Lane was the head of the national guard and he sent the national guard. The Armory was where the Library is today and the national guard was stationed here. People did not like it. The guard went about arresting people as witnesses and then they took newspaper pictures taken that day and arrested the people that they saw in the pictures. After this they booked them and took them for questioning which made people mad. So the national guard lined up outside of the armory and a group of Somerset County farmers snatched the guns out of their hands. They were all 18 and 19 year olds from the western shore and were scared of the farmers. They had just gotten a new fire engine and they backed it across the street and pulled out the hose and rushed water into the armory. There was a newsman on the wood porch across from the armory trying to take pictures and a Somerset County farmer waited and watched until he got under the hood to take pictures and then he cold-cocked him. After that they brought out the tear gas and that brought things back to normal.

The legend was told to me as I mentioned the ones I had heard in class but would not tell them specifically what they were until I heard theirs. Both said they knew from more or less first hand knowledge. Mrs. REDACTED witnessed the whole thing because she was pushed out in the street. Mr. REDACTED said that he remembered some of it from experience but had heard the rest.

Interview #20

Date Collected: 11/24/70
Collector: NAME REDACTED
Address: Mt. Rainier, Md.
Birthplace: St. Johnsbury, Vt
Age: 21
Race: White
Occupation: Student

Place Collected: REDACTED
Informant: NAME REDACTED
Address: Delmar, Delaware
Birthplace: Delmar, Delaware
Age: 74
Race: White
Occupation: retired painter

A Lynching

About 1920 a Negro was accused of molesting a white girl in Salisbury. He was already in jail when a mob lynched him and hanged him on an oak tree in the yard in front of the courthouse. One man by the name of NAME REDACTED cut off a toe of the Negro and took it home in his pocket. REDACTED has since died. He was killed when he was run over by a train.

NAME REDACTED also said that he went to a hanging once near Easton. He got close to the pit where they hanged the man but he couldn't see. He did hear him fall.

I have known NAME REDACTED for about a year. He is the grandfather of my boyfriend. We went over to visit them one night before dinner and asked them to help. There were four of us present.

NAME REDACTED lived in Delmar at the time this lynching and it created quite a lot of talk at the time. I have never heard NAME REDACTED tell of it before although I'd heard of the lynching.

He has also contributed a tale of treasures and a story of large mosquitos.

Interview #21

Place Collected: Salisbury, Maryland

Informant's Name: NAME REDACTED

Address: REDACTED Road

Salisbury, Maryland

Birthplace: Salisbury, Maryland

Age: 60

Race: White Caucasian

Occupation: Dept. Manager of furniture at Sears

Several years ago a colored man shot a lumber owner who I believe was named Elliot. When the police and some citizens arrested the colored man they beat him up and he had to be put in the hospital. The townspeople got him out of the hospital and took him to the courtyard to hang him up in a tree. It was early in the evening then. Later, they drug him down behind the post-office where there was the Old Red Star Bus Terminal. They poured gasoline on him and burned him. Then they drug him down Main Street to the bridge where they put his body over a telephone pole.

The National Guard came down from Baltimore to arrest the ones involved. They picked the people up during the early morning hours and took them to the armory which was where the library is now.

Next morning they tried to put the arrested people on the buses to take them to Baltimore. Each time they tried to put the people on the bus the fire department would come out and block the entrance. They finally dressed the criminals "(I guess that's what you'd call them)" in army uniforms so that they could walk from the armory to the bus on a plank. They finally moved on to Baltimore.

That evening they took a movie tone truck and pushed it down to the Wicomico River, where the Wicomico Theatre is now, and pushed it overboard. A photographer came to take pictures and his car was turned over on its top.

Next day the Baltimore papers wrote articles about the Eastern Shore. Most of them were by H. L. Menkin. He described the Eastern Shore as a bunch of cannibals.

The next day, small trucks bringing the newspapers were burned.

A lawyer came down to be available for the case. The people gave him two hours to get out of town. They didn't have to tell him a second time because he took their warning and left rather quickly.

Interview #22

Date Collected: June 15, 1973

Collector's Name: NAME REDACTED

Address: Salisbury, Md.

Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.

Age: 21

Race, nationality, or ethnic background:

Caucasian

Occupation: Student

Place Collected: REDACTED

Informant's Name: NAME REDACTED

Address: Salisbury, Md.

Birthplace: Crisfield, Md.

Age: 72

Race, nationality, or ethnic background:

Caucasian

Occupation: Lawyer

Item: Lynching

There was a lynching here in Salisbury a few years ago. A white man was killed in his office. A nigger was accused of killing him and the people hung him on the courthouse lawn. I think someone else did it and in my opinion it was wrong cause they didn't even give him a trial.

Interview #23

Documentation of Individual Items of Folklore

Date Collected: June 21, 1973

Place Collected: Salisbury, Md

Collector's Name: NAME REDACTED

Informant's Name: NAME REDACTED

Address: REDACTED

Address: Salisbury, Md.

Princess Anne, Md.

Birthplace: Pennsylvania

Birthplace: Showell, Md.

Age: 58

Age: 33

Race, nationality or ethnic background:

Race, nationality or ethnic background:

American-Caucasian

American-Negro

Occupation: Proprietor of Store

Occupation: Teacher

Item: (exact transcription- use additional sheet of paper if necessary.)

Historical Legend The Salisbury Lynching

It was in 1933. It was not the last lynching; it was the only lynching in Salisbury. It was in pretense to a man that was suppose to have slain the owner of a mill, Mr. Elliott. He was lynched at the courthouse on a big tree and brought to the corner of the lake and left there.

Sent the "Dandy Fifth" and attorney General Lane was leading them. They arrested four men and held them in the armory. Lane's car was pushed in the river; the Baltimore Sun car was pushed overboard. The four men were taken to Baltimore. No one was able to identify the men and as far as I know they were freed but they never returned to Salisbury. When Lane came up for Governor, they didn't think he was going to make it, but the people on the Eastern Shore did vote for him. I believe this was an aftermath of the Ewell Lee Case. She was in R.E. Powell's when the tear gas started. (Collected at 3:30 P.M.)

Interview #24

Date Collected: 7/23/71

Collector: J.

Pocomoke City Md.

Birthplace: Gumboro, Del.

Age: 31

Race: White

Occupation: Teacher

Place Collected: home of collector's
grandparents

Informants: REDACTED

Addresses: REDACTED

Birthplaces: Near Gumboro

Salisbury, Md.

Gumboro

Ages: 77, 31, 51

Occupations: Retired, Position

Classification Specialist, Seamstress

GRANDFATHER:

There was a colored man shot a store owner in Salisbury. They caught him that night and lynched him in Salisbury. They dared the law to bother them. That was about 35-40 years ago.

HUSBAND:

Someone from Chincoteague told me they had him in the back of a pickup truck, riding him around town after he was dead.

MOTHER:

Well, I always heard the man was waiting outside a man's house. After the man left, the colored man went in and attacked the man's wife.

GRANDFATHER:

Well, I couldn't say. The Green Davis family was killed during Governor Lane's administration. People was perty mad.

Informants were aware of my purpose in asking them to relate the story.

Interview #25

Age: 53

Race: White

Place Collected: Salisbury, Md.

Occupation: car salesman

Informant's name: NAME REDACTED

Address: Rolling Road

This is how my father described the hanging which took place in Salisbury on the courthouse lawn.

Apparently the whole affair was traceable to another, almost unrelated, incident. A black man killed an entire white family, the Ewells. He was arrested and held for trial. Somehow a "smart lawyer" got the case and kept delaying the trial. "Where the money came from, no one knows." Town feeling ran pretty high, but apparently nothing could be done.

Meanwhile, another black man shot a white man, a Mr. Bounds, over a wage dispute. After a police chase, the black man turned the gun on himself and shot himself. He was taken to the hospital, wounded but alive. At this point the townspeople stepped in. They agreed that this case "Ain't gonna be another damn Ewell case." Several men entered the hospital. The man's room was on the ground floor. They "threw him right out the damn window", screen and all, "drug" him down to the courthouse, and hanged him. There seems to be some debate as to whether he was alive at the time of the hanging or not. Dad seemed to think that he was probably half dead by that time and may have actually been dead or at least unconscious when hanged. Some say that he was "pleading" when he was being hanged. Dad witnessed the hanging and does not believe this to be true. He believes that the man was almost, if not completely, dead and was hanged as a "symbol." There is also some debate as to whether or not he was dragged to the courthouse lawn with the rope around his neck. He may have been carried bodily. After the hanging, gasoline was poured on the body, and it was burned. The National Guard was sent in. Their cars were overturned. Dad reports that a farmer knocked down a member of the National Guard and took away his gun. The Salisbury Fire Department used their hoses against the Guard. Dad also states that the Guard really refused to fight against "their own fellow man." During the National Guard incident, local children were kept in school even after hours and not allowed to leave unless their parents came

to get them. Mother remembers her father coming for her and her sisters. Dad sneaked out of a window and went home.

Apparently the Sunpapers published the incident very harshly. Dad remembers their using the word “barbarians.” Local feeling ran very high. For years, no one would buy the Sun. Dad still won’t. A Sunpapers truck was overturned and thrown into the Wicomico River.

At the actual hanging no one wore masks, and no one would testify concerning who was there.

Dad summarized the incident by saying that it was “a very bloody thing” and that Salisbury was like an “armed camp” at the time.

I had heard about this hanging for years from several different, and now unremembered sources. Dad told me this berios on Jun 10, 1972 at my request after dinner.

Interview #26

Collector: NAME REDACTED

Birthplace: Williamsport, Penn.

Age: 27

Race: White

Occupation: Carpenter

Lynching in Salisbury

This guy was killed I don't know who he was, I always thought he worked at the courthouse. And this other guy, this colored guy was accused of killing him and when he got caught he got hurt. He was arrested so they took him to the hospital. He was under guard in the hospital.

Well, you see, there was this other family that was murdered over near Pittsville and a black man had been accused of killing them but he got off. And so they decided (some people around town) that this man wasn't gonna get off. They went over to the guards but the guards weren't there. They'd gone to get a cup of coffee or something. So they went and took the guy out and took him to the courthouse and hung him.

Then some people took the body down and they tied him on the back of a car and dragged him around and strung him up along Lake Street. Then the "Baltimore Sun" started writing editorials about the barbaric Eastern Shore. So they would get the papers when they came in at the train station and they burned them at the train station.

The "Baltimore Sun" sent some reporters down and they were writing stories about the "barbaric Eastern Shore" so they threw their cars in the river.

Governor Ritchie - he got a little upset about this. He sent the National Guard down because he didn't like what was going on. And they, of course were quartered in the armory.

And the locals didn't like the idea of the National Guard coming down and butting into our business.

So they (a bunch of watermen) surrounded the armory and the National Guard was inside. And then, they - the armory was where the library is now right across the street from the fire department - they just started pumping water into the armory and of course they had guns and they were gonna shoot them.

So, they got hold of the governor and he said - "Let's evacuate" and they pulled them back to Easton or Cambridge.

They have never come back until the race riots and then they used local troops.

This version of the lynching was copied word for word from my husband's oral account of the lynching. He got his information from a Mr. NAME REDACTED, an old man who claims he witnessed a lot of the happening and from his Grandfather who was living in Salisbury at the time of the event and is still living here.

Collector: NAME REDACTED

Address: REDACTED

Birthplace: Washington, D.C.

Age: 22

Race: White

Occupation: Student

Interview #27

July 1970

NAME REDACTED - Collector

Salisbury, Md. - Address and Birthplace

27 - Age

Caucasian

Collectors mother -> Informant: NAME

REDACTED

Address: Nanticoke, Md.

Birthplace: Salisbury, Md.

Age: 60

Caucasian

Anna and I drove down town during the lynching in Salisbury. We saw him being dragged around and hanging up a pole on Lake Street. They burned him on Popular Hill Ave. behind the Post Office. Hung him up a tree in the court yard. Then they hooked him back of something and hung him up a light pole on Lake Street. Some people from Princess Anne were in on it.

Collected from mother at her home with husband present July 1970. There was much discussion between mother and father as to exact circumstances. It was decided that the mob got the man from the hospital and he had been injured. He was supposed to have killed the man he worked for over a grudge. However, there was some contention that the dead man's son had killed the father in an attempt to steal money from his father.

Interview #28

Informant: NAME REDACTED

Quantico Road

Salisbury, Md.

20

Salisbury Lynching

"This black man killed an important man in town here because the black man owed the white man money and the white man was threatening to foreclose on his house or something. So what happened was a lynch mob of white people rushed into the county jail in the court house up here on Main Street. They took him and hung him up and threw gasoline on him and burned him right there. And this happened right up town there, around 1930."

-The storyteller is twenty years old and has lived here in Salisbury for ten years, after moving from Glen Burnie. He heard this story from his mother.

Collector: NAME REDACTED

Gaithersburg, Md.

June 4, 1972